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MIDNIGHT
MOVIES

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Truth & Movies

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The
Annkeepers



Chapter

1

IN WHICH WE REVIEW

THE INNKEEPERS



The Innkeepers

TI WEST COMBINES THE REPUTATION OF A MORTAL
KILLER WITH THE TENSION OF AN HORROR FILM

Directed by Ti West
Starring Sara Paxton, Pat Healy, Kelly McGillis
Released June 8

Words by David Jenkins

consider horror movies as an explosive device. They begin. The touchpaper is lit. There's an initial flick, which dies down almost instantly. The nervous spectators, perched at a safe distance behind tape and laptops, observe in expectant dismay as the spark inches ever closer to the payload. It's the job of the filmmaker to calculate the variables: how long is the fuse? How high is the spark? And, perhaps most crucially, how big is the eventual explosion?

Director Ti West has, over the course of five feature films, engineered a way to make that spark almost inevitable to the human eye. That is to say, if you didn't approach his cinema knowing that he was predominantly a horror director, it probably wouldn't be instantly perceptible.

West's abrupt 2007 indie shocker, *Trigger Man*, usually evokes the unerring minimalist elegance of Kelly Reichardt, or Gus Van Sant's *Gerry*, rather than the squalid survival horror into which it – eventually, bloodily – mutates. *The House of the Devil*, the exceptional 2009 film that launched West as the acceptable face of alternative, cine-literate horror, played a similar game – suggesting the presence of evil lurking behind the walls rather than indicating any explicit terror.



The Hush is his latest offering, and arguably his masterpiece. The pleasures of this taut, low-budget chiller don't derive from its leisurely pacing or the pair of beautifully nuanced performances at its centre, but the feeling that with each subsequent film, West is honing, distilling, justifying the essence of his craft.

There is no clutter in a Ti West film, and his concision to genre was ranked at best. His films have more in common with the greatest of *Cinema of Dread* – supposedly directorless like Michael Haneke, Stanley Kubrick or





“YOU GET THE FEELING THAT WITH EACH SUBSEQUENT FILM, WEST IS HONING, DISTILLING, PURIFYING THE ESSENCE OF HIS CRAFT.”

consider horror movies as an explosive device. They begin the *Insidious* in his. There's an initial flare, which dies down almost instantly. The services operations, perched at a safe distance behind tape and barriers, observe in expectant dismay as the spark inches ever closer to the payload. It's the job of the filmmaker to estimate the variables: how long is the fuse? How bright is the spark? And, perhaps most crucially, how big is the eventual explosion?

Director Ti West has, over the course of five feature films, engineered a way to make that spark almost invisible to the human eye. That is to say, if you didn't approach him knowing that he engages in somewhat the same work, it probably wouldn't be instantly perceptible.

West's slender 2007 indie shocker, *Trilogy Men*, initially evokes the unerring minimalist cinema of Kelly Reichardt, or Gus Van Sant's *Grey*, rather than the outgung carnival horror into which it—eventually, bloodily—mutates. *The House of the Devil*, the exceptional 2009 film that launched West as the acceptable face of alternative, one-karate horror, played a similar game—suggesting the presence of evil lurking behind the walls, rather than inducing any explicit terror.



The Insidious is his latest offering, and arguably his masterpiece. The pleasures of this talky notebook thriller don't derive from its laconic pacing or the pair of beautifully nuanced performances at its center, but the feeling that with each subsequent film, West is honing, distilling, purifying the essence of his craft.

There is no clutter in a Ti West film, and his concessions to genre are muted at best. His films have more in common with the patient *Visions of Grand*, dispensed by directors like Michael Haneke, Stanley Kubrick, or—well, David Lynch. In that light, one might see *The Insidious* as West's *True Peaks*: So rich are its chambers and the history it suggests that you feel this could have worked as a full-blown TV series.

Chloe (Sara Paxton) and Luke (Pat Healy) man the desk at the soon-to-be-closed Yankee Police Inn, a once-'60s-pop gasthouse located in an eerily tranquil Connecticut suburb. Despite the cherry constantly by, the inn also boasts a colorful history as the location

of a grisly murder. The victim was one Madeline O'Malley, a jittery bride who is still said to haunt the Pelee's corridors, stairwells, and stairs.

There's a lot of chatter in *The Insidious*, but hard though it may initially appear, it's an essential component of West's devious MO. Chloe is not your classic empathetic scream queen who casually spouts an inventory of her hopes and dreams. There's the sense that she's lost, that when her inescapable secondary actress, she will drift into boredom and depression. She has trouble connecting to her peers, as seen in an amazing early scene involving a forced conversation with a self-involved coffee barista (Sara Paxton, who else?). The fact that she displays a blind faith in her ability to ghost here is possibly the most heartbreaking detail of them all. Paxton, an actress who has mainly been involved in TV and indie school, captures these fine shades in an astonishing central performance.

As the current goes hot in the scene, Chloe and Luke decide to while away their final working hours ghoulishly searching for evidence of the supernatural. With the aid of a EVP recorder and a tape recorder, the tone of the game is to sit and wait for the ghosts to make their presence known. The coming sound design plugs us in to Chloe's headphones as she listens out for spirits—the first building of pause keys through a chain of static is a technical masterpiece.

Righties even Kelly McGillis checks in, playing a fading actress who happened to star in one of Chloe's favorite TV shows. A mysterious older man, too, arrives insisting he stay in a room that's now used as a laundry cupboard. Both,

ANTICIPATION.

Ti West follows up the career-making *The House of the Devil*.

ENJOYMENT.

Thus is horror cinema expertly stripped back to its very core.

IN RETROSPECT.

The ending is a tad too subtle, but the build-up is the work of a master filmmaker.

TAINTED LOVE

Words by *Ti West*
Illustrations by *Adam Craft*

I suppose my interest in horror really all started back at my local video store. I come from the small city of Millington, Delaware. It's a nice place to live, but hardly a hub for filmmaking (or any other artistic outlets). The only real access I had to movies was a cheap three dollar theatre that showed second run films, and our one video store, Video Frequency. I would usually only get to go there on nights that my parents were going out. It was a way to ease the stress of being an under qualified babysitter. My mom would take me to the store, let me pick out one or two VHS tapes and then dump me back at the house under the questionable supervision of our teenage neighbour. =



suppose my interest in horror really all started back at my local video store. I come from the small city of Wilmington, Delaware. It's a nice place to live, but hardly a hub for filmmaking (or any other artistic outlets). The only real access I had to movies was a cheap three-dollar theatre that showed second run films, and our one video store, Video Frequency. I would usually only get to go there on nights that my parents were going out. It was a way to ease the stress of having an under-qualified babysitter. My mom would take me to the store, let me pick out one or two VHS tapes and then dump me back at the house under the questionable supervision of our teenage neighbour. —

The funny thing is, I  really interested in the babysitters, just like they weren't really interested in me. So our focus mutually shifted to the movies I would rent. For some reason, my parents had no opinion about the kind of content I wanted to watch. I only mention this because often I would rent R-rated movies that my babysitters weren't even allowed to watch in their own home. More times than I can count, they would leave at the end of the night far more afraid than I ever was. Funny to think that their rebellious way of seeing 'restricted' movies was taking care of an eight-year-old.

I'm not sure what attracted me to the horror genre.



My first job was at a video store. I was the only person who worked there. I was the only person who worked there. I was the only person who worked there.

I suppose I have always been interested in counter-culture content. Horror movies, comic books, arcades, punk rock: anything that had its own subculture was alluring to me. I grew up in the 1980s, which may be the last decade of sustainable subcultures. What was so cool to me about horror was that it was isolated in a separate section of the video store. They kept it in the back corner next to the pornos. It was one step above the smut. There was something dark and seedy about that, and I liked it. You didn't find other children in this section: only weird, defanged creeps slowly browsing the aisles.

It was magnetic to me. I liked for sneaking back there and peaking at the marvellously illustrated box covers. They depicted horrific scenes of monsters, murder and mayhem. It was the stuff nightmares were made of. I was mesmerised. Each one was more terrifying than the next - almost daring you to rent them.

To some degree, especially as a kid, watching these films was like a twisted endurance test. The descriptions promised an experience unlike any other - something most people could never handle. It was intimidating and sensationalised. It made you wonder if you were strong enough to take on the challenge. Once I got a taste, it quickly became an addiction. Like any addiction, however, when overexposed you no longer get the same high.

I soon found myself watching everything and anything I could get my hands on, just looking for the next *The Exorcist* or *The Shining* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. I wanted something that would scare me the way those films did. I have such vivid memories of the Grady twins, Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers, the clown under the bed in *Pollangeist*, Zerk from *Ped Sematary*, etc. They all affected me in ways nothing ever had before. It was as if they awoke emotions I didn't know existed.

I'm still trying to reproduce these feelings. It may be impossible. It may be something that only exists when you're a child. The ignorance and sense of wonder is

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in Belgium before Belgium was Belgian.**



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Chapter

2

IN WHICH WE

INTRODUCE OURSELVES

LWides:

What do you love about movies?

Ti West:

The first memory I have of being excited about movies was when I saw Raiders of the Lost Ark on late-night television. I'd never seen anything like it before. I instantly became obsessed with Indiana Jones, and would be forever in awe of the iconic onscreen violence. It was transmutating. Even today, I use the image of Foht's melting face as my Twitter photo. For an image on a screen to cause that kind of reaction is incredible.



Hearts, penicillins and umbrellas



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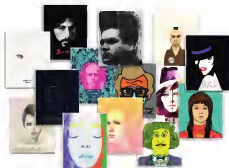
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★★★★

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY BOBCAT GOLDTHWAYT
GOD BLESS AMERICA
CASTING BY

CHART TIME

TAKING OUT THE TRASH, ONE JERK AT A TIME

CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY IN CINEMAS JULY 4

CHAPTER

3

IN WHICH WE

DISCUSS THEMES OF

UNCOMMON INTEREST

INSPIRED BY OUR FEATURE FILM



You're not
have to do
quest

THE
(Un)Making
of
Horror

Quar Dard is based on a number of true incidents that took place in the 1980s in South Africa, including a series of unsolved serial murders in Namibia. As the crimes really happened, we were horror-based to shoot in some of the most remote and inhospitable places on the planet, so essentially we had to make a low-budget international film crew out to the Skeleton Coast and keep everyone alive - and sane.

"The parent company, Palace Pictures, was forced into receivership while we were shooting, so there were major cash-flow problems. Our budget dropped from \$2m to £1.5m, and the movie went floating away. StudioCity never arrived, animals never arrived. The crew dwindled down to about eight people by the end, and a lot of the key vehicles had to be pushed into shot - we were shooting a road movie and the number of cars we had access to was dwindling. I was writing scenes the night before, then shooting them at 6am the next day with very little idea of where we were going. In some respects this mitigated us from the film's fever because it became a lot more surreal and cerebral."

"It's a strange place, Mamola, like shooting
as the face of Mars. One of our locations was

the world's largest open-pit uranium mine, which led to some uneasiness. When dust storms blew up, the mica in the sand glittered so it looked really radioactive. People were running for cover. Later, the front-of-house decided we couldn't afford Faller's earth [fake] clay anymore, so they replaced it with a cheap mixture of lime and cement dust, which was billed yes. Nobody told us, but they shoveled it into the 343 turbines and we were plastered with toxic dust.



"There were a number of incidents that were a little close for comfort," the explosives on our exploding truck were a little bigger than we expected, and something like 40 hire cars were written-off altogether. There were an awful lot of tensions between the crew and the production; one of the truck drivers cracked three of the clapper loader's ribs. After that he was as good as mislaid the stock and we lost an entire day of filming."

"I shot and shot until every bit of film I had access to had been exposed. When I got back to the UK,

the lab held onto the negative and the various pieces of the movie were impounded by the people who were owed money. It took about three years for me to clamber through the legal mess and get back the various pieces of the movie.

"Because it had already been written off as bad debt, no one wanted to pay for post production so I had to raise the money myself. By then I was in debt to the tune of \$300,000, out of my flat and my girlfriend had dumped me. But looking back, I'm still very fond of the movie, I realise that it couldn't have been made under any other circumstances."

Member/director/officer/supervisor
 Bashed Case (1982)

I was making up my little movies in Ram. I didn't care about whether it was commercial or not. I just liked making crazy shit. Edgar Lewis, who ended up producing *Saschet Case* said, 'Hey, have you ever thought about doing a feature-length film? I'll get the money.' After I don't remember how many months, he finally said, 'Well, I can't raise a dime.' I was so pissed off, I started shooting *Saschet Case* with my own money the following weekend. When we got the footage back there was something terribly wrong with it. The camera had the wrong eyepiece as. So the next weekend I reshot it all - so I'm already doing retakes on my own movie.

me stuffed inside the chest of drawers, wearing a glove and looking out of a crack in the door at a mirror so I could direct the scene. That's the glamour of filmmaking, kids.

"I didn't shoot any of the New York sequences with a permit - it's all hit and run. In the film, you notice [lead actor and Bellafi's human twin/career] Kevin Van Hootenberry walking past a porno shop. That's take two. Take one is him filming from the open door of a van, and someone came charging out of the store, leaped in the van and was threatening to kill us all - he thought we were from CBS News. Later, we had Kevin running down the street in Tribeca bare-assed naked. But there was no one there to notice. That's the way it was back then. I guess if you can't do SX shots to dazzle the crowd, have a gay van around naked."

"Even when it was done it wasn't done. We sold it to a company called Analysis Films and they decided to make it even more of a comedy by cutting out all

the blood. They opened it at the Muevly Theater in New York and it was a flop. I was totally disgusted - all that work to have somebody cut the guts out of it. Eventually they opened it uncensored in Dallas where it started selling out. Later, I'm walking past the Muevly and I see a line going round the block. I happen to see John Cazavon who did the make-up effects. I asked him what he was going to see. He said, "Gawd, Dave, your film and it's bloody as hell!" Analysis changed the print and it played there for two years. For now, it sounds so simple: "let's go and make a movie!" But it sure isn't.



THE DEAD

Co-writer/director/producer
The Dead (2018)



"We painstakingly listed every single item we needed to make an incredibly efficient mobile filming unit, and we bought this van and kitted it out with everything. We paid a lot of money for it to be shipped to Africa and, basically, the ship left without it; not only that, there was no other ship. So the earliest we were going to get most of our equipment was five weeks into our production time. I still feel sick. It was a blow we never, ever recovered from."

"In Africa, we were stopped by armed police all the time, money being extracted from us [\$30,000 of the \$550,000 budget went on bribes]. I got mugged at knife-point and my cash, cards and driving licence were taken. Then they tried to put me in jail for driving without a licence. Africa's a beautiful place and there are lovely people in it, but it's very corrupt. I guess that's not breaking news, especially when you're carrying big shiny boxes of film equipment; they think you're 'Hollywood' and you have money to burn."

"Rob [Froese, the lead actor] is one of the fittest people you'll ever meet. But he got cerebral malaria, which is the worst kind. If it doesn't kill you it can turn you insane.

His personality changed, he just went gaga and collapsed, losing control of himself and his bowels - a very undignified situation. He was in hospital for two weeks. I was just standing there thinking, 'We're actually going to end up killing people.' The whole thing was falling apart on every level."

"I remember we were shooting a sequence in an orphanage, and as we were wrapping, hundreds of people came for their money and it got scary - really scary. I'm talking Black Hawk Down, thinking you're going to be torn limb from limb

scary. We all piled into our vehicle; the whole van was rocking, we thought they might topple it. The gaffer said, 'They'll put a nail on top of our heads and smash it in with a brick.' It was a sickly, horrible, cruel feeling, given all the pain we'd gone through just to make a bloody film.

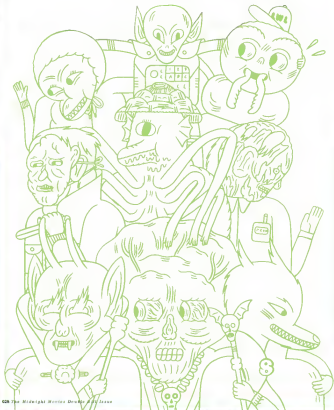
In the end we just had to drive at them - we're in an orphanage, remember - and we did. We didn't run anyone over thankfully, but that fear, a horrible guttural feeling, I can still feel a little piece of it now."

"I can look at the film now and I'm proud of it, but I'm still frustrated about all the things we wanted to do but couldn't. Anyone reading this, trust me, I can't even explain to you how hard it was to make this film. We turned down loads of offers of distribution for £80 because we wanted it on the big screen first. We didn't hug 35mm ciphers across the desert so it could be shown on a mobile phone. We wanted to give people a journey they would never forget." [E]



Words by Anton Bittel

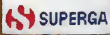
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BONDED BY BLOOD

*Inside the strange sodality
of the horror fan.*

H



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Here Be Monsters



*Writer and mythographer Marina Warner traces
the cultural origin of our fears, from
campfire stories to modern cinema.*

In her book, *Go Go the Soggyman*, Marina Warner traced the formation of our fears over thousands of years of history, unearthing the hidden meanings in ballads, fairy tales and the art of 'making mock', she performed a stunning piece of cultural archaeology that shed fresh light on old terrors.

Warner spoke to *Wires* about the ongoing manifestation of fear in modern cinema.



Marina Warner: There are two different types of fear, broadly speaking. One is the 'monstrous' - the monstrous is more entertaining than its counterpart, the 'phantasmic', which seems to hit a very different spot. You might have the same sort of visceral reaction in your guts when you go to a movie that has ghosts in it or a monster in it, but you're much less likely to giggle with scary, happy pleasure at a ghost. That's because there are different sensibilities at play. The monster is very carnal - it's to do with the sensatious of the body that can, in a way, be grasped; they're not mysterious. But the phantasmic is eerie, unknowable and doesn't lend itself to the laughter that Freud defined as the way we ward off fear...

Film is equipped extraordinarily well for both. Of course, it's brilliantly able now to create endless special effects that are monstrous, but its nature, its almost intrinsic character as a medium - something flimsy and filmy and intangible - has made it a wonderfully sympathetic medium for the spectral. That's why there's been a profusion of all kinds of spectral manifestations in cinema.

I think that really is happening - I do think the new media has reconnected us with the auditory and the oral. Our storytelling tradition goes back to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* [in the eighteenth century BC] - that's a very long time in which people have been telling stories. But if you look at the point at which these stories become written and then read by someone in private, the silent text is a very short period of time in terms of the work of human culture.

The campfire has two aspects that are reflected in current film culture. One is that very often you make the story concerning because there's a witness - either the person telling the story

story has experienced it themselves or has met the witness. And in a way that's what the camera phone is: a witness. It's festively moving and incredibly convincing to view footage of an incident that's happened in the street because this is authentic testimony, however crude. We really are 'there', and that's a very strong narrative device. That's the structure of urban myth.

The other way that digital media has very much contributed to the uncanny and phantasmic, is that we're the first generation really to see ourselves in action all the time as if by an outside force. It's constantly available to us to see ourselves in real time, in motion. My mother heard herself talking and found herself a stranger. Now we all know exactly what we sound like, what we look like. But our consciousness is externalised. It's no longer what the world looks like from inside my head, it's what the world looks like when I hold up my camera, which is my prosthetic, and look back at myself in it, in the world.

It fuels our sense of the uncanny, this imagined Other, this surveillances camera that is also oneself. We find ourselves, in a sense, Other to ourselves. That eerie feeling is very strongly present in the way stories are told now.

Yes, I think so. I would single out the zombie as something that clarifies our preoccupations and

our sense of ourselves. The zombie is a comparatively modern monster. It surfaces at the very earliest in the West in the eighteenth century. It's originally an African idea that comes in with slavery but it's also mutated considerably since then. Our zombies now are not the zombies of the Caribbean at all.

The zombie has come to fully characterful life in movies since *The Night of the Living Dead*, which is one place where the monstrous and the phantasmic truly meet. The Romero zombie has some characteristics of the monster - the cannibalistic, devouring appetite, sometimes the deformity. But it also has this very powerful charge because it's a soulless creature that has no consciousness: it's just impelled horribly by some outside force.

Zombies are the spectres of consumerism, and they're the spectres of the loss of identity. In an era when people are taught to idealise words like 'individual identity', 'mastery' and 'agency', it produces a huge deficit of constants in most people because we also know that we're being thoroughly manipulated by all these other circulating images and propaganda. It's tremendously hard to resist the enormous wealth that's invested in hypnotising us to want the now this and the now that. So we live with a constant tension between being told we should be masters and being aware that we're slaves. The zombie perfectly expresses that. It's a brilliant symbol. ☺

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CHAPTER



IN WHICH WE REVIEW

THE LATEST FILM RELEASES



Safe

Directed by **Benoît Yvelin**

Starring **Jason Statham**, **Catherine Chan**, **Chris Sarandon**

Released **May 4**

With his fingers (or should that be feet?) in seemingly unassailable action-packed pies, Jason Statham has become a real-life incarnation of Adam Norton's裴森安德鲁, the smoldering one-man army forever pushed too far by badasses who are clearly unwary of the consequences of "fucking" with him. This *Safe* meets Ultimate Cagefighter chase thriller sticks to the bodiplane, and is none the worse for it. Statham's Luke Wright crosses the Russian mob, gets widowed and prepares to chuck himself under a train. He then finds a cause to live for in the shape of a 18-year-old Chinese mafia genius.

Moi, too, is on the wrong side of the lawless. As a computer-savvy wunderkind, she has been trafficked from China to NYC to serve as a walking laptop for the "Buck's" nefarious protection racket, the ultimate paperless office. But Luke's very protectiveness, the Russians, are wise to her value and determined to wring her dry. With no other corrupt police precinct also taking an interest, who can assist Moi in her daring escape? How about that uniform chunk biker dressed like a gladiator, sweeping and teetering at the edge

of the subway platform? He looks a good bet.

That the set-up is vacuum-packed into the first 10 minutes should provide a clue as to the preoccupation of the remaining 100 left over. Namely, the dismantling of cars, hotels, restaurants and human lives in a thousand-mile-an-hour whirlwind of fists, boots and hot lead. It's such a breathless ride from one set-piece to the next that there's barely time to admire the stylish camerawork that frames the carnage so elegantly. The total sensory overload efforts dialogue that mostly feels culled from a hundred tough-guy also-rans. Fortunately, Statham has a way with a one-liner that, at its best, recalls vintage-era Bruce Willis. As a bona fide global action star, he is the surprise Most graduate of the Lock, Stock class, with a screen presence that betters on the right side of know-nothings. Statham probably doesn't like press because he can't trust himself not to blurt, "I am a world-famous movie star Fucker' ridiculous!"

But, of course, it isn't ridiculous. At the arrow-buzzed robber than shows here, he can pull off ludicrous dialogue and frenetic butt-kicking with more aplomb than most.

and without the splinter-popping mayhem that scrapes the idea of Anne and Sly. In the underplayed on-the-run relationship between Mei and Luke, Statham is less assured (although Catherine Chan is impressively grave as the perennially aged Moi), but that's not really what we're here for, is it? Can chase, jaws bust, bullets fly and windows burst in slow-mo-crystal showers. If you want a movie to change your life, try *Shower*—but be warned: you won't get a perfectly-sung 30-man chop-socky tear-up in *An Inland Sea*. **Paul Fairclough**

ANTICIPATION. Was Transporter Out yet? **1**

ENJOYMENT. Whip-smart pacing and breathless photography mask the silliness admirably **3**

IN RETROSPECT. Only half as dumb as it looks on, *Safe* is still a cut above the average actioner **3**



Killer Joe

Directed by **William Friedkin**

Starring **Matthew McConaughey, Ervile Hirsch, Juna Temple**

Released **June 29**

With *Killer Joe*, William Friedkin does for third chances what he did with passion in *The Exorcist*. Namely, to make you never want to taste, touch or even look at the stuff ever again. What begins as a weary, Jim Thompson crime caper in which a hard-boiled get-rich-quick scheme falls apart, just as swiftly and stambolically as it was devised, soon devolves into a hellish comedy of sustained sexual harassment that plumbs solo-erotic levels of physical and psychological depravity.

As with Friedkin's under-rated *Bag*, this is a vicious adaptation of a play by Tracy Letts. Yet again, it takes the form of one long, inexorable crescendo fuelled by the naive willingness of a group of people to accept a dangerous stranger into their lives. The repellent midwest-trash South clan is comprised of drunken Nick Ansel (Thomas Haden Church), his shiny pizza-chef wife Shelia (Gina Gershon), their wild, increasingly-estranged son from his first marriage, Chris (Ervile Hirsch), and their half-witted baby doll daughter, Dottie (Juna Temple).

When Chris decides that he wants to kill his real mother to secure a massive life insurance dividend, he nuds Ansel into the help of Killer Joe (Matthew McConaughey), a rogue lawyer

and freelance assassin. Though unable to offer a development for his death-giving services, the pair allow him temporary no-holds-barred access to Dottie, with whom he is instantly enamoured. If payment is never received, Joe gets to take Dottie away with him.

Robbster, rather than – as you might expect – softening the film's already extreme demeanour, is McConaughey, who manages to locate the inner sadist within the hemp-'n'-backpack Southern boy who has become his true screen persona. With his all-black attire, devilish charm and violent insouciance on keeping to the rules of the game, *Killer Joe* recalls Brian Packer's *Bronstene and Trench* in both structure and the central notion of a mysterious stranger whose intellectual superiority allows him to irrevocably alter the lives of a poor, unsuited and thoroughly poisonous family unit.

Friedkin is currently 76-years-old, and as with films like *Alan Smithee's Wild Grass* (made at age 87), *Jean-Luc Godard's Fais Souvent* (made at age 79) and *Manoel de Oliveira's The Strange Case of Angelina* (made at age 100), *Killer Joe* demonstrates all the vigour and caustic humour of a half-dead newbie who straight out of film school

As close to the mirror as this film gets, it's difficult not to read as biting provocation, mainly down to the lapidary performances, the non-batched colour palette and a profusion of named, knockabout humour and deviant sexual idiosyncrasies. One night even see *Killer Joe* as a raucous satire on himself, Tennessee Williams-style Southern psychodrama, when instead of the wailing heroine getting carried off to the asylum, she's, well... no, it's probably best not to say 'you have to ask' is it possible to take a film seriously in which one of the leads is bent on half to death with a can of purple paint? **David Jenkins**

ANTICIPATION. One of the leading lights of '70s Hollywood is hardly what you'd call a safe pair of hands these days

3

ENJOYMENT. If you're genuinely awakened by this film, your fancy home needs replating

4

IN RETROSPECT. Lovely to see Friedkin on such mischievous form and McConaughey finally revealing his dark side

3

The Source

Directed by **Kodu Mihallem**

Starring **Laila Beikhti, Hafika Wazli, Saleh Baki**

Released **May 12**



Relaxed just over a year after the Arab Spring uprisings that spread across the Middle East and North Africa, Kodu Mihallem's *The Source* places a group of semi-autonomous Muslima women at its core. In a small, unnamed mountain village, iron-willed newby Laila (Laila Beikhti) and the rest of the female community enforce a love strike against their husbands in protest at having to fetch water from a sticky mountain-top spring.

The treacherous rocky path that leads up to the life-giving source has incidentally taken the lives of many of the village's unborn sons and daughters. After her best friend miscarries following a fall, Laila (with the aid of her learned teacher husband, Sassi, played by Saleh Baki) decides to take matters into her own hands.

Distilling its inspiration from a real-life love strike that occurred in Turkey in 2001, as well as Aristophanes' Ancient Greek play *Lysistrata*, *The Source* is a brave attempt to tackle some controversial issues while trying simultaneously

to function as an entertaining drama.

French-Jewish director Mihallem demonstrates a genuine deftness for light comedy, particularly in an early scene involving a visiting group of French tourists as the women perform a traditional song and dance number; the language barrier pushes into the Guller genre from gathering the ladies' gaze sooner, that their new folk are slowly, insouciant children unable to find for themselves. However, as the film's tone-darkens and the women's light becomes ever more desperate, Mihallem loses control of his narrative.

A subplot involving Laila's childhood sweetheart – now a botanist obsessed with life's minutiae – fails to register, while the women's suppressed rage eventually shifts towards the local government for failing to provide essential amenities, effectively absorbing their frequently absent husbands. That's very much. Separation here, purporting to tackle some of the hot issues of

modern Islamic society, yet ultimately unwilling to make a definitive stand in the same way as *Angkor* or *Paradise* made masterwork. **Daniel Green**

ANTICIPATION. Last year's Arab Spring will hopefully have a positive effect on Islamic filmmaking – Mihallem's contemporary tale could be a vital vanguard effort.

ENJOYMENT. Performances are strong throughout, but Mihallem seems unwilling to nail his personal beliefs to the post.

IN RETROSPECT. A whitewash tale of women, water and sex-dick, with precious little darkness, drive or purpose.

4

2

2

Arirang

Directed by **Kim Ki-duk**

Starring **Kim Ki-duk**

Released **June 8**



There's a famous interview with Lee Byed from *Myo* magazine in which the notoriously cantankerous Velvet Underground trouman starts to openly weep when played a saxophone sequence from his latest album, *The River*. On the page, it was difficult to gauge whether this was an act of pure, undirected narcissism or a sincere demonstration of emotion in full, glorious flow.

Enter South Korea's Kim Ki-duk, a film director who, it transpires, has much in common with Byed. He's lauded as something of a genius and a national treasure, despite the fact that his creative output has been fairly at best. *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring* is his *Transformer*, *The Isle* is his *Revs* and *Three Is a Family* (not *Jesus*: His latest, the highly personal and unforgivingly experimental autobiographical *Arirang*, could be chalked up as his answer to *Mind Machine Music*).

During the production of his 2008 film, *Arirang*, there was an accident on set in which

the lead actress was nearly choked to death. She was only saved as a result of Kim's personal intervention. *Arirang* – named after a Korean folk song which Kim drastically reworks at 30-minute intervals – sees the director, now suffering from aortic block and a severe case of the blues, chronicling his life during a period of self-imposed exile. His camera becomes a mirror. Kim stares into it and simply rants. Then he makes an expense with a machine he built himself. Then he rants some more.

Kim has some serious issues to deal with, and his doom-laden exploration of life's ultimate finity and death's omnipresent gaze is verbose, repetitive and only sporadically profound. His propensity for self-congratulation (he has decorated his cabin with the posters and scraps of all his past films) makes it much more difficult to empathise with his struggle. Also, like Byed, Kim films himself in floods of tears as he watches footage of himself (notably) dragging a cellphone up a hill.

John Dardot's brilliant *EW* confessionals, *There Is No I in Film*, seem an apt point of comparison, even though it's a much more sophisticated, nuanced and philosophically rich work. *Arirang* is a slog, as Kim – intentionally or otherwise – writhes up from a confused lower attempting to claw his way out of depression to a rather disheartened, vain and violent gentleman who can't understand why the entire world won't see him for the tortured and sensitive genius he clearly is. **David Jenkins**

ANTICIPATION. Despite a critic of mauling, it was the surprise winner of the 63rd Cannes (legged) prize at Cannes 2010.

ENJOYMENT. The diametric opposite of happy fun times.

IN RETROSPECT. Vigorously interesting, but mostly polished and confusing.

3

1

2

Juan of the Dead

Directed by **Alejandro Bruguas**
Starring **Alberto Díaz de Villegas**,
Jerome Malinos, **Andrés Duro**
Released **May 4**



"I'm a survivor," declares sticker Juan (Alberto Díaz de Villegas) in Alejandro Bruguas' *Juan of the Dead*, before listing all the events from Cuba's post-revolutionary era that he has indeed survived. "Just give me a chance and I'll sort it out."

This unapologetically flaccid regard to a full-blown zombie outbreak in Havana is just another of Cuba's endless troubles ("They want to eat, just like in the Special Period—but they don't just eat out"), and also as an opportunity to be exploited: "We're Cubans," says Juan, explaining to his estranged daughter Carla (Andrés Duro) why he has decided to turn zombie-baiting into a profitable business on the side. "That's what we do when things get tough."

It is business as usual for the state authorities, too, bemoaning the undead deadliness and insisting that "everything is back to normal" when the zombies have taken over the streets

entirely. Meanwhile, whether by accident or design, Juan's best friend Lázaro (Jerome Malinos) seems to be taking out as many of the living as the dead. "Can't you make a distinction between the good guys and the bad guys?" Carla asks him. "In this country," he replies, "it's always been difficult to do that."

And so Cuba's first zombie flick gets a twist of mass-panic line and shuffle-stopped tempo to the social satire of George A. Romero's *Dead of the Dead*, while also observing the post-modern metacommentary savvy of Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead*. For when Bruguas is not using the repressed deceased as a prism through which to affectionately lampoon half a century of Cuban history, he is either punctuating everything from the shark-on-zombie action of Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* to *Enter the Planet* when he has to kick us for the last as Peter Jackson's *Five Alive*, or having his characters

pose such daffily crucial genre questions as why, when it comes to the post-apocalyptic living dead, "some are fast and some are slow."

The film's pace is sometimes scintillatingly uneven, but its blood and laughs are well spread, and its Havana setting unique enough to give up much of the shock. **Anton Bitel**

ANTICIPATION. *Zombies in Cuba?* Head for the hills!

3

ENJOYMENT. A big, brassy Caribbean rick of undead tropes and clacker gags

4

IN RETROSPECT. From zombie flick blends *Intervista* into buddy comedy with slyly subversive political commentary

3

The Pact

Directed by **Nicholas McCarthy**
Starring **Caity Lotz**, **Casper Van Dien**,
Haley Hudson
Released **June 8**



The original, 11-minute version of *The Pact* was a last-chance audition for Nicholas McCarthy, a struggling LA writer/director who got lucky when abig shot accidentally caught his short film at Sundance in 2011. Asked whether he had a full-length script, McCarthy said "yes" and spent a frenzied six weeks giving credence to this lie. The result was studio approval and after a low-budget summer-to-autumn shoot, an extended version of *The Pact* premiered at that year's festival.

The opening is promising, with a readily established premise suggesting that the scores will probably start early. Two sisters are thrown back to their childhood home by the death of their mother. One of them disappears while the other, Annie (Caity Lotz), is left to make sense of a maddening story which contributes to classic gothic manner (longs and messy whistles) but with odd techno-envy flourishes (it appears to know

how to navigate Google Maps). Additionally, Annie is haunted by colour-coded nightmares that gradually reveal more about a mysterious room.

So far, so mildly intriguing. But where the short left the movie's mysteries unsolved, the feature fills its time by unpacking them and, subsequently, blunting their impact. Lingering tension is then killed off by the introduction of irrelevant, roughly sketched characters. Hello, Casper Van Dien's paramedic cop: why not barge around for a bit? Into miscellaneous blind confusion and her marking protective boyfriend.

Lotz gives a credible performance as the heroine, an independent, Isabella Salander-type talent, but her character's exposed as underwritten when the narrative decides to anchor the ghost story and genre-bending tale to her family's traumatic past. Meanwhile, McCarthy's quiet ability at jump sequencing is unimpaired by a procession of pounding drums, screeching

cellos and weeping pains.

Aggressive audio, like the filler characters, only serves to enhance the realization that the central premise is insufficient for the running time. *The Pact* feels like exactly what it is: interesting material warped to fit the wrong format. **Sophie Monks Kaufman**

ANTICIPATION. Didn't exactly go down a storm when it played at Sundance

1

ENJOYMENT. A good idea lights unacceptably for its life

2

IN RETROSPECT. The idea of a moon, haunted by unrepentant things has a potency that sticks in the mind

2

Friends with Kids

Directed by **Jennifer Westfeldt**
 Starring **Jennifer Westfeldt, Adam Scott,**
Chris O'Dowd
 Released **June 29**



Both an unofficial sequel to *Friends with Benefits* and an unofficial precursor to the inevitable *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Friends with Benefits* (Jennifer Westfeldt's sophomore effort) once again ponders whether it's possible to sex your wild cat while retaining the facade of a responsible, professional adult.

Jason (Adam Scott) is all about scoring hard and scoring often, but while his downstairs neighbor, Julie (Westfeldt), is up for some no-strings love-in, she's also desperate to become a mother. And so a pact is forged: Where he will impregnate her, they will both rear the child, but there will be no romance to weigh them down. They wouldn't want to end up like their friends, all married with children, and all desperately unhappy. Because that's what happens when you fall in love.

It's hard to accept that two people so in touch with their emotions would maintain a notion so dulled with obvious flaws, so when

their friendship eventually begins to strain, it comes as no real surprise. Plus, Westfeldt has a strange, almost seely concept of platonic friendships. It seems to be the point two people reach when they have no qualms about dropping disabused cracks about the elasticity of their vaginas into polite conversation.

So it's difficult to measure the will to get behind these fools, and yet there are stretches where Westfeldt's script glows, such as an expertly executed dinner-table scene, which manages to engage the entire venerable *Rosewater*, it comes off like a frost-free, autumn-spin-off, replete with postmodern badde (Jon Hamm as a whiskey-sipping husband), young strumpet (Megan Fox as Jason's interim belle) and comely sidekick (Chris O'Dowd, delivering an American accent that sounds like he's just had his tonsils removed with a pair of bolt-cutters). Kristen Wig barely gets a look-in as Jason's floundering mother.

There's a point near the end where you think that Westfeldt is going to round things off on a going-downer note. But then we dutifully segue into a monumentally tame (begrudging) forgiveness session before both characters agree — in a surreal nod to *Eyes Wide Shut*? — to “lick the shit” out of one another before the credits roll. **Channing David Jenkins**

ANTICIPATION. The cast looks like they could pull this one through easily. **3**

ENJOYMENT. The inebriated performances and petty humor disguise the serious questions Westfeldt is asking. **2**

IN RETROSPECT. Maybe this is a better, more thoughtful movie than you initially give it credit for? **3**

Kosmos

Directed by **Reha Erdem**
 Starring **Seyhan Yaeli, Tarkan Tuncel,**
Serkan Korkm
 Released **June 15**



Kosmos (Seyhan Yaeli) is on the run from what, we don't know. It appears to be a thief, running over an endless snow-covered landscape, a trail of money stowed in his shoe. When he miraculously saves a young boy from drowning in a river on the outskirts of a small, desolate outpost, the townsfolk welcome him. Believing he's been sent from God, they offer him food and board in exchange for manual work.

Kosmos may have special powers, but he's a simple man. Anaximander in some ways, he believes the body and soul want the same thing. He eats only sugar and speaks almost exclusively in biblical verse. He has no need for material possessions but strains when he needs money.

His relationship with the townsfolk sours over time as he shows no interest in working for his keep, absorbing free tea and shortening

the restaurant he's supposed to be tending. His stock is highest when he's useful (performing miracles), but sentiment inevitably changes.

Director Reha Erdem, who impressed with his 2006 film, *Tramvay ve Rüzgar*, keeps matters purposely ambiguous in *Kosmos*. We learn no history about our enigmatic, Christ-like hero — we can't even be sure his supernatural gifts are wholly real. Music by moody post-rockers A Silver Mount Zion, and the non-diegetic sounds of harsh blasts, howling winds and police sirens add a sense of desolation and apocalyptic dread, but they feel too calculated and manipulative to seem real or moving.

Interesting philosophical, mostly lifted straight out of the Bible, are mooted but never explored in a wider context. Erdem lessens their impact by diluting and distancing from them with a couple of superfluous subplots (a military wife-drug addict and a murder mystery).

One gets the impression that Erdem was aiming at similar territory to Bela Tarr's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, with the single-minded lead, stray dogs fighting and slow-motion shots of animals wallowing in a slaughterhouse. But this is most certainly a poor relation. **Shorelyn Spencer**

ANTICIPATION. Director Reha Erdem delivered the ruminative *Tramvay ve Rüzgar*, but there's been a long delay in the release of this follow-up. **3**

ENJOYMENT. Cryptic and slowly paced, often not in a good way. **2**

IN RETROSPECT. It's an interesting film, even if it's never clear what Erdem is getting at. **2**

Mia Hansen-Løve

Thanks for the memories

Interview by David Jenkins

Mia Hansen-Løve

Filmography

Goodbye First Love (2011)
Father of My Children (2009)
All is forgiven (2005)

Mia Hansen-Løve's third feature film, *Goodbye First Love*, is named after an incredible thing I said lyric from the track 'First Girl I Loved'. The reason for this is because she had the song on a loop while she was writing the second draft of the film. Even though the events that feature in *Goodbye First Love* are true and personal, an intimate catalogue of the things that come from trying to emotionally detach yourself from that all-important adolescent first love, 'First Girl I Loved' could be the film's unofficial anthem: 'Well, I haven't seen you now since may in the short year. And the last time I seen you, you and you'd joined the Church of Jesus. But me, I remember your long red hair falling in our faces as I kissed you.'

The film is a fitting portrait of love lost, found and then lost once more. French actress Lola Croiss is utterly convincing as Hansen-Løve's sad-eyed, airtight screen surrogate, Camille, while her languorous love affair with Sebastian (Unruffledly's reckless, lighter, Sullivan, plays out on locations that are very close to the director's heart. 'I did not choose to film in the Ardèche because it was beautiful, I chose those places because I love them. They are from my childhood. For me, this film is very special. It's the only time I will film in my own places. The house that Camille says is the 'house of my dreams', the river, the cherry tree, the beach, every road and path, everything is taken from a place that I know by heart and will know forever. For me, it's very intense.'

It's obvious that this most melancholy of films offers a naked chronicle of Hansen-Løve's own formative experience: the stories played

on a bench towel to keep it from blowing away; the lengthy, philosophically-inclined love letters; the sense of cathartic dread as a first love knowingly descends into rottingness. 'People ask me whether I wanted to make a film about a first love. I made this film because I needed to make it,' she states. 'I needed to get rid of some things that I needed to express, to place a frame around chaotic feelings. For me, this film was a quest for meaning. I tried to see if there was a meaning in my own life, to try and connect my adolescence with my vocation as a filmmaker.'

It sounds like she's using filmmaking as a form of therapy, to work through her personal emotional issues with a camera and actors. 'Yes and no,' she says, thoughtfully. 'Filmmaking is not like therapy where you get healed. It's more about learning to live with things that are difficult to live with. It's cathartic. It's about filling some voids. One sentence that I like very much, which I often try to say to myself, is the title of a book by an actor called Dan Eldon who died very young. He travelled all around the world and he drew pictures in a diary. The title of the book is *The Journey is the Destination*. When you write a film, you have questions that you want answered. Big questions. You hope that by making your film you will find answers. It's very disappointing when you make a film, because it's rare that you get those answers. But the experience of making the film gives meaning to those questions. So you get meaning, but not from the place you expect.'

You get the sense from Hansen-Løve's small but perfectly formed characteric oeuvre that she's a very perceptive person with a non-photographic recall for small detail. 'No! I have

memory for the details, but most things go on one ear and out the other. Films are the memory that I don't have. It's the big feelings and the small details – there's nothing in the middle. I don't get stuck in my memories as I can't remember anything about the travel I made or the people I met in my youth. It's terrible. Godard said, 'Making films is about creating memories of things that never happened.' The scenes, the order, the way things happen are not the same as reality. Cinema is not a reconstruction.'

Hansen-Løve appears to be locked in a constant and intense internal discourse about the meaning of her films, but also the function of filmmaking in general. Though she doesn't always intend to become a writer and director, it came very naturally. 'Originally, I just wrote poems. But once I was very unhappy with what I was writing, and I never found the right way to express my feelings. This was until the day my father left my mother for another woman. They had been together for 15 years, so it was a violent moment. After this event, I wrote my first short film and it was just one scene between a father and two children. It's not something I really wanted to do. It just came totally spontaneously. I think this spontaneity was great. With the poems, they were something I had decided upon and it had become like tortures. I wrote the film to escape from that. The origin of my vocation came from a physical experience and the cathartic side of filmmaking. It has to do with the fact that it combines art and life. It's very physical.'

Has the stress returned to writing poetry? 'No. It actually makes me spend just to think about it.'



Goodbye First Love

Directed by Mia Hansen-Løve

Starring: Lola Croitoro, Sébastien Urzandowsky, Magne-Håvard Brekke

Released May 4

At just 30, Mia Hansen-Løve has now produced three remarkable feature films, especially notable for their maturity. For her second, 2008's *Father of My Children*, she tackled the life of a middle-aged man and the effect of his death on his family. This time she reaches back further, to the youth of the original French title (*Un Amour de Jeunesse*) and the relationship of 35-year-old Camille (Lola Croitoro) and her boyfriend, Sullym (Sébastien Urzandowsky).

It is all encompassing, a mystery to Camille's mother (Valérie Bonreumil), who feels her daughter was happier outside a relationship that seems to bring her nothing but worry and misery. Ever since her 2007 debut, *All is Forgiven*, Hansen-Løve's films have been set in a determinedly bourgeois world. But compared with the paternalist presence of Louis-Do de Lencquesaing in her second feature, Camille's father is a hazy, nebulous figure.

The crux of the disagreement between Camille and her boyfriend is his determination to go to South America for 10 months to discover more of the world, and himself.

This inevitably implies the dissolution of their relationship. When Sullym embarks on his travels, Camille struggles to find meaning in her life without him.

It's tempting to read too much into the film's title, whether in French or English, but Hansen-Løve means, beyond this seemingly callous relationship. She skips forward a few years, and then again, to reveal the devastating effect on Camille of her first passion. Unable to connect, Camille gradually reverts herself through her architecture studies. As with *Father*, *Goodbye* could be said to be a film of two halves: the director pursues Camille's newfound interest with an almost eccentric fervor.

The audience is immediately alien to the presence of her Norwegian professor, Lorenz (Magne-Håvard Brekke), who draws Camille out of her shell. With her sharp eyes, Croitoro is initially an animal-like presence, crawling over her lover. She is shown in the nude with her young boyfriend but, now with the new, older partner, a curious form of discretion.

A chance encounter with Sullym's mother on the bus allows the young couple to meet again,

this time when Lorenz heads off to Africa. There are nods to the film's *Prehensum* – a debate on cinema, and a strike that disrupts Camille's plans – but *Goodbye* is marked by its authenticity.

The manner in which Hansen-Løve portrays young relationships is a precise subject in contrast to Eric Rohmer. Then there's the influence of her mentor and partner, Olivier Assayas. As a one-time film critic and screenwriter, she is right at the head of a new wave of other (notably female) French directors, including Karol Queliné (*Love Like Moscow*) and Rebecca Zlotowski (*Belles Époques*). **Overall: A++**

ANTICIPATION. One of French cinema's most important young talents.

ENJOYMENT. An honest, universal portrayal of early adulthood.

IN RETROSPECT. Hansen-Løve may have now purged a period of her life – where will she go next?

4
4
3

Death Watch (1980)

Directed by **Bertrand Tavernier**

Starring **Romy Schneider, Harvey Keitel,**

Henry Dean Stanton

Released June 1



This fascinating and flawed fifth feature from Bertrand Tavernier combines '60s class-war politics and media exploitation with an homage to such kitchen sink sci-fi as Godard's *Alphaville* and Truffaut's *Haisakari*. 407 Bet it's a semi-disputed Glasgow of the future, weird-to-do author Katherine Mortenhor (the always-sensationalizing Romy Schneider) is selected as a patsy by anarchy-encompassing TV network to star in their hit reality series, *Death Watch*.

In this proposed future, all diseases have been cured and so the (predominantly bourgeois) viewing public have become addicted to the experience of watching someone die. With a video camera surgically implanted into his left eye, new investigative-reporter Roddy (Harvey Keitel) wheels his way into Katherine's life after she's been diagnosed with some version of his life-threatening illness and, at the onset of his sleazy pasteurizer, Vincent (Henry Dean Stanton), keeps the camera rolling.

Though Roddy is initially presented as fry and unimpeachable, it's not long before he's coming over Katherine and ingesting his part in the whole sordid endeavor (It's torn revealing a glaring conceptual defect regarding the mechanics of the camera implant). The series with Keitel and Schneider are raw and intimate despite the fact that, dramatically speaking, the pair seem like an ill-fitting screen couple. Stanton is left as a cynical mouthpiece for the corruption which justifies his actions by pointing to the sky-high ratings and saying that they're simply serving the appetites of a bloodthirsty populace.

While it's easy to draw parallels between *Death Watch* and the largely execrable deluge of reality TV that faps up our skulls, this presents a more thoughtfully voyeuristic take on the phenomenon. Tavernier and writer David Kaplan (adapting DO Compton's 1972 novel, *The Unsleeping Eye*) are interested in the willingness

of cultural elites to abuse and distort the notion of death for their own ill-gotten gains. It's a metaphor that Tavernier cleverly stretches to both the police and government in the gritty Glasgow he depicts in rife with fear, crime, poverty and death. **David Jenkins**

ANTICIPATION. A better '80s sci-fi satire from Bertrand Tavernier with Romy Schneider and Harvey Keitel. Lasts as long as *Barry*?

3

ENJOYMENT. Romy Schneider positively stokes while the atmosphere remains suitably chilly.

4

IN RETROSPECT. A worthy rediscovery with the philosophical chops to match its sweeping genre ambitions.

4

Free Men

Directed by **Issaïa Ferroukhi**

Starring **Tahar Rahim, Michael Lonsdale,**

Mahmoud Shalhaby

Released May 15



Annoying your film's opening frame with a request by true events has become a lazy habit of screenwriters and directors, setting alarm bells ringing like a red top hat's clatter of a noose? In the gleeful debagging of some allegedly overused backdrop. With *Free Men*, director Issaïa Ferroukhi and co-writer Alain-Michel Blanc show they're not lacking in the imagination department, but their mashing of historical fact seriously undermines their film's dramatic credentials.

After being caught crossing down by the Gestapo, young Algerian immigrant Younes (Tahar Rahim) is threatened with deportation unless he can infiltrate a German mosque that's been blacklisted as a Resistance hotspot inside the walls of this majestic nation, Younes uncovers a fully fledged Islamic liberation outfit, inconspicuously fostered by a sagacious senior pastor (Michael Lonsdale). But he proves to be a lousy informant and is

cut loose by the investigating Nazi officer (and awfully left to walk free), allowing him to ally himself with this Muslim brotherhood.

In an echo of his outstanding best-in-show performance in Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet*, Rahim makes the sharp transition from illiterate pawn to quick-witted knight with confidence and poise. Not so convincing are his character's motives. Though his family's homestead acquaintance with a persecuted Jewish mayor (Mahmoud Shalhaby) accounts for his initial commitment to the freedom fighters, it's never clear to what extent Younes actually believes in their cause.

Ferroukhi's intention is to set the record straight over the long-debated sheltering of North African Jews during World War II by Muslim insurgents. But with few surviving witnesses and little in the way of hard evidence accounts to go by, the director resorts to fleshing his film out with disarming dramatic

poetics and a dead-end, romantic subplot involving an undercover Lotana Aulad. *Free Men* is well acted and entirely watchable, but has to go down as a rather flimsy interpretation of one of the lesser-known subchapters in French history. **Adam Woodward**

ANTICIPATION. All eyes on *A Prophet's* Tahar Rahim in this Resistance-era drama.

3

ENJOYMENT. Passionate if unsubstantial period piece. Rahim in the real deal, though.

3

IN RETROSPECT. We weren't expecting *The Silence and the Fall*, but stronger emphasis on historical truth would shore up this admirable revisionist fable.

3

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2 Days in New York

Directed by Julie Delpy
Starring Chris Rock, Daniel Brühl, Julie Delpy
Released May 18

Hopping from one chic capital city to another, director Julie Delpy follows her 2007 comedy *2 Days in Paris* with a frazzled, intermittently amusing sequel. Having split with Jack, her partner from the first film, artist Marion (Delpy) now lives in New York with her son Lolo, bipolar DJ boyfriend Mingus (Chris Rock), and his daughter from a previous relationship. Though work commitments obstruct the girl's sex life, they are happy—if ill-prepared for the visit of Marion's eccentric French family.

As soon as they arrive, the floodgates open for a cascade of excruciating *Meet the Parents*-style situations. Cultural stereotypes abound, including unrestrained sexuality (Marion's sister, Elise, played by Alexa Leland), poor, garlic-infused personal hygiene (her father, played with sly comic relish by Delpy's real-life papa, Albert), and generally lecherous, antagonistic behaviour in the form of Marc (Alexandre Nahon), Marion's disolute ex, who seems to confuse his own addiction to weed with hackneyed notions of 'blackness' such as the charms of Mingus.

Mingus and Marion make for an intriguing pair, and the drama hinges on this central

couple's ability to maintain their relationship and professional lives in the face of such a blizzard of disruptive activity. Sadly though, a handful of lovely observed scenes (including a discussion between Mingus' parents and Marion's mother that unexpectedly turns to political rap poems: *The Last Poets*) are outweighed by a smorgasbord of misfire set pieces, which accelerate quickly to a point of shrill climax. Amid the strained farce, there's barely time for the key characters to develop or address the stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings that arise.

2 Days in New York's biggest problem is that for a comedy, it simply can't jump. Many of the setups are telegraphed and wouldn't pass muster on a mid-ranking TV sitcom. The language-barrier jokes swiftly pall and, worst of all, there's a grainy, unconvincing subplot about a fake brain tumour, which stretches both credibility and patience.

Mingus, impressively played by Rock, is the film's most interesting character. He seems to be the very embodiment of Time magazine's formulation of the idea of 'post-blackness'. A Barack Obama fanatic, he's introverted, obsessed by his music and art, and characteristically functions as a subtle

comment on the rather heavy-handed actor's self-analysis of Marion, who literally sells her soul to the highest bidder as part of a confessional art project.

Despite its flaws, *2 Days in New York* is a good-natured, fiercely contemporary affair in which Delpy has captured a visually vibrant, colourful cityscape. It works best as an refreshingly frank portrayal of a liberal modern family in all its complexity. How often do we see content mixed-race families in mainstream entertainment? Furthermore, it effectively communicates the universal, heightened anxiety inherent in that dreaded visit from the in-laws. For that, it deserves credit. **Ashley Clark**

ANTICIPATION. A sequel to look forward to

4

ENJOYMENT. Strained, and not as funny as it should be.

2

IN RETROSPECT. Reflection reveals a warm heart, sweet nature, and contemporary sensibility

3

Even the Rain

Directed by Icíar Bollaín

Starring Gael García Bernal, Lulu Tosar,

Karla Elzajalde

Released May 18



Icíar Bollaín's *Even the Rain* is set against a backdrop of the "Water War" that took place in Bolivia in 2000. It draws parallels between that event and the colonization efforts of Christopher Columbus several hundred years prior to it. While mostly worthy, however, the film fails to intellectually or emotionally engage.

Film director Sebastián (Gael García Bernal) is making a movie about Columbus' travels. The idea is to present the colonization from a different angle: The American crew are shooting in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for its geographical and photographic virtues, but also for the meagerness of its laborers in the form of extras.

As the crew rolls into town, the locals of the area, and by extension the people that they're coming as actors and extras are fighting for their right to maintain cheap access to water

as a multinational corporation exercises control over its supply, charging extortionate prices for a resource as simple and vital to life as air.

Filmmaking being what it is, it takes a single-minded director to try and get the film made, a tight-ass producer (Lulu Tosar) to ensure the film comes in on budget, and a token straight actor to play Columbus (Karla Elzajalde). But what is more important, making a film or having access to water?

While Bollaín and writer Paul Lavery do try to add a level of complexity to proceedings — an asshole producer has a change of heart when tension between the villagers and the authorities escalates — the characters remain one-dimensional at best. As with his usual collaborations with Kim Loach, Lavery's socially-conscious writing style appears to be the beginning point for the drama,

rather than a story that reflects those issues. What's left is something to admire from a humanist standpoint, but to forget as art or entertainment. **Shirwyn Spencer**

ANTICIPATION, *Even the Rain* and wife Icíar Bollaín and Paul Lavery have made a movie. **10**

ENJOYMENT, A handsomely treated on filmmaking and Third World exploitation. And not a particularly engaging one. **2**

IN RETROSPECT, Never really exists in any given area, and so watch factor is a zero. **1**

She Monkeys

Directed by Lisa Auerbach

Starring Matthilda Ponsness, Linda Molin,

Isabella Lindqvist

Released May 18



It's tempting to compare this, a tense, startling, satirically hypersexualized sexual-drama of a fiercely competitive female sport, with 2014's *Blue Is the Warmest Color*. The resemblance here, rather than ballet, is equestrian vaulting, which involves performing complex acrobatic feats on horseback. As with ballet, there's a tension between the outward grace of the performance and the physical struggle it conceals.

It's this struggle for composure that defines the relationship between new girl Emma (Matthilda Ponsness) and the more experienced Cassandra (Linda Molin). From the start, each seems sufficed by the other — both feel threatened, unsettled, attracted — but there's little physical or verbal display on either side. Far from a straightforward will-they/won't-they dance, there's particular stony, part-power struggle, part-psychological warfare.

Meanwhile, away from the vaulting ring, Emma's younger sister Sara (Isabella Lindqvist)

begins to confront her own sexuality after an accident at the local swimming pool changes her perspective. It's this storyline that comes closest to earning the taboo-breaking label with which the film's been saddled, but it also feels deliberately poised to undermine, lacking the compulsive, astringent quality of Emma and Cassandra's developing attachment.

She Monkeys marks a debut for just about everyone involved. Director Lisa Auerbach's most notable experience prior was as assistant director on two episodes of *The Killing*, while both Ponsness and Molin are entirely new to the screen. The clarity and subtlety of both performances impresses, while Auerbach and co-scripter Josefine Adolphson skillfully establish an engaging undercurrent of danger, and even violence, in the girls' relationship. What's gradually taboo-breaking here is the idea of femininity as a weapon, emerging most notably in one

disgusting scene between Emma, Cassandra and an unwary male love interest.

The comparison to *Blue Is the Warmest Color* is useful only as counterpoint — every dual that Adolphson cranked right up to 11, Auerbach turns all the way down, creating an atmosphere of unbearable, quiet tension. **Emma D'Elia**

ANTICIPATION, Strong team, but a cast and crew this untamed could go either way. **3**

ENJOYMENT, Auerbach balances understated drama with emotional violence to mesmerizing effect. **4**

IN RETROSPECT, A deftly measured, deeply unsettling portrait of a power struggle. **4**

Ben Rivers

Fringe benefits

Interview by David Jenkins

Imagery by
Ben Rivers
Two Years at Sea (2011)

"Make me a star," were the words spoken by Jake Williams when the anti-establishment Ben Rivers asked if he could make a movie about his life. Jake lives alone in the wake of Scotland, subsisting largely off the surrounding land and relying on its evidence by salvaging trucks and cars and scavenging from his immediate environs. Rivers had met Jake before, as he was the subject of his 2006 short, *This is My Land*. Even though *This is My Land* runs at 14 minutes and his new film, *Two Years at Sea*, runs at 85, you could see the latter as a sublime distillation of the former, extracting its observational tone, world-conscious and handprocessed, from monochrome stock and creating a feature, quiet abstract vision of what it means to live in a beautiful solitude. This is how Rivers pitched his film to Williams: "I explained to him that I was interested in making films that would never be shown on TV."

Rivers has been making films since 2003, his first being *The Old Dark House* in which he photographed the rooms of an abandoned, haunted house to deconstruct his legend in the visual and emotional idea of decay. In 2005's *AA, Liberty*, feral children in druid smocks dance and fight on trash piles, a utopian expression of freedom in a world reduced to rubble. *Sea, River* (2011) chronicles the last days of a family electrolysis concern, juxtaposing the anachronistic technological comportment of the employees with huge chunks of industrial mould.

"With *This is My Land* and *Two Years at Sea*, I was specifically searching for someone who lived in the wilderness," notes Rivers. "I had an idea that people like that existed, but obviously they don't advertise themselves. With Jake it was a friend-of-a-friend. He said he was the closest neighbour, but he actually lived 16 miles away. He suggested that I go and visit. I ended up making

This is My Land. As with *Two Years at Sea*, this was made with a couple of visits, initially in early summer and then in late winter to get the seasonal change. Initially he liked *This is My Land* so I stayed in touch. He also appears in another film called *I Know Where I'm Going*, which is a kind of road movie around Britain."

Originally, Rivers wanted to find three people in different places and try to interweave their stories. Yet he kept feeling that he wasn't finished with Jake. "It also felt like it was a good idea because we already had this relationship," he says. "He's completely at ease with the camera. I think he's a really good actor."

It must be stated at this point that, despite its appearance, *Two Years at Sea* is not a documentary. The situations are set up, directed, repeated, and Jake – too certain degree – performs for the camera. "Jake was paid as an actor. This film is fiction. It's an exaggeration of someone's life. Jake and I agreed on this. If people believe every minute of it, then that's totally fine. Some people have told me that they feel like they've been deceived, especially when they see Jake at festival screenings. I think it's kind of great that there are people out there who think that documentaries are by their very nature pure fact."

Rivers made the decision early on that he didn't want to give out too much precise biographical information on Jake. There are no clear character traits, no other human characters and, here a single instance of Jake happily merrily to himself upon finding a hat of expired cough medicine, no dialogue. Yet, there are subtle clues for those wanting to learn about Jake's life prior to his self-imposed exile. Photographs appear like chapter headings insuring women, children and even Jake as a younger man. But, the heartwarming suggestion of a family abandoned or perhaps but still remains open – could these people be characters in Jake's scavenged memory archive?

"What I was interested in, especially with the photos, was giving clues as to his previous existence," says Rivers. "Photographs are inherently melancholic because it's nostalgia, it's about the past and what has been. I don't even know what all those photos are. They're all little stories. Audiences see sometimes fragments as I'm perfectly asking them to fill in bits of gaps. I make the kind of films I like to watch. I get tired of films telling me things."

Rivers is also interested in the limping between reality and fiction. He likes filmmakers who toy with this notion. "I like Jean Bouché. He's all about the acknowledgement of the apparatus of filmmaking and how that might affect the reality of a situation. With someone like Paul Weisman, who's trying to get as close to objectivity as possible, I just think you can't do it. As soon as you set up a camera and you chose to point it in a specific direction you're already making editorial decisions."

Two Years at Sea is a deceptively simple movie, one which, on reflection, can be read in a number of different and often conflicting ways. Jake could be seen as an emblem of sustainable living and the film could be held up as some kind of economic reparable. "When I make films, I move away from ideology. I'm not interested in making films that espouse one way of life above another. I'm not open-minded. There's a point at which I'm looking independently and about people who live alone in a forest, but I don't think this is propaganda. I'm not sure I like the use of the term 'parasites' to describe my work or subjects. There is a simplicity of life away from urban culture, but in the same breath I could just be being sensible. I often feel about my films that they could be taking place in the distant future or the distant past. I reckon I could argue that *Two Years at Sea* is actually a sci-fi movie."



Two Years at Sea

Directed by Ben Rivers
 Starring Jaka Williams
 Released May 4

When awarded the main jury prize at the CPHE Docs (Copenhagen Documentary Film Festival), Ben Rivers' best feature, *Two Years at Sea*, was cited for its 'resonating depiction of the euphoric feeling of being immersed in an elemental environment.' It's a succinct summation of what it's like to watch this portrait of a man living in the wilds of the herring.

Rivers prefers for viewers to find out what they've been watching after the screening, and it doesn't matter much going in if you know that the sole human figure is Jaka Williams, who lives deep in a forest near Aberdeen, Scotland. Five years ago, Williams was the subject of Rivers' short, *This is My Land*, offering bird-feeding tips while bouncing around his property and rattling goodwill before sending viewers off with, 'Cheerio then, all the best.'

In *Two Years at Sea*, Williams is cooperatively mute, heard only in occasional underappreciable mumbling. His living space is desolate: Rivers terms it 'he might be living in Tarkovsky's *Zerk*' from *Stalker*, inhabiting a natural landscape where any manmade objects are so decayed that the inorganic becomes a part of the scenery. This is the environment of 2008's *AK, Liberty*, where a rising bushbush

outside overflows with water in a similarly decaying rural retreat, or 2011's *Sick, Boredom*, in which an electroplate factory as its last days has taken over with animal carcasses closer to organic, cancerous-looking growths than mere industrial byproducts.

All the sounds heard in *Two Years at Sea* are only what Williams wants to expose himself to, aside from some snores going deep heard over a hill. Going to work while the camp's loudspeakers blast star music, he's a jaded hippy agrarian, living semi-off the land. Rivers' work has been compared by writer Michael Siskind to British documentary stalwart Humphrey Jennings, and there's a never-too-rosy sense of Williams as a pragmatic eccentric preserving a self-consciously marginal existence with deep cultural roots.

The first image of *AK, Liberty* isn't even a shot, but instead glazing whale header film with the occasional speck and the faint sound of a projector. There's secular spirit to be had in *Two Years at Sea* when trying to determine what's the result of deliberate processing and what's actually raw/scenellemental.

Stalker Gris in your eyes? Is land playing on the fantasy floor in *Sick, Boredom*'s final minutes, and it could serve as Rivers' motto. Day

or night, smoke always provides an opportunity for textual contrast: the black cut seen in *This is My Land* returns to sit quietly here, watching steam rise as its own occasionally breath. In Rivers' hand-processed films, lightning and thunder is predicted by the film's sudden withering, a pre-atomic cellulosid crackle.

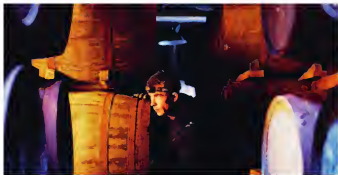
This is My Land is a double-edged tale, this space is both Williams' property and critical continuation. *Two Years at Sea* showcases a private, unseen escape for just this once-lifestyle that nonetheless has a polemical point. The citizens of *AK, Liberty* are driven to their outpost by poverty. Williams is a pioneer of voluntarily grilling there first. **Vladimir Kline**

ANTICIPATION. An emerging British artist/filmmaker delivers his first feature and it arrives with festival garlands aplenty.

ENJOYMENT. A remarkably lyrical and ideologically cohesive doc-fiction hybrid.

IN RETROSPECT. Rivers' next longform effort can't arrive soon enough.





The Angels' Share

Directed by **Ken Loach**

Starring **Paul Brannigan, John Hareshaw, Roger Allam**

Released **June 1**

The economy is in meltdown, unemployment is rising, public sector cuts are executed without mercy – give the PM a pearl necklace and it's Thatcher's Britain all over again. So where's the nation's foremost foodbrand and social realist when you need him? Making easy meat films, apparently.

Father-to-be Robbie (Paul Brannigan) is a regular in Glasgow's criminal courts. When he's sentenced to community service for the latest offence, he's assigned to a group led by Harry (John Hareshaw), a generous soul with a passion for fine whisky. Harry takes Robbie and the rest of the self-described 'NEER' on an unofficial day trip to a distillery, where he hopes to expand their cultural horizons. They decide instead to stage a robbery, the proceeds of which Robbie will use to provide for his young family.

Paul Brannigan was plucked from the world which the film describes – and has the scars to prove it – so there's no doubting his authenticity. The problem is he's so authentically hard-fared, he lacks the expressiveness necessary to win an audience over. A detailed flashback to a particularly sluggish crime doesn't help

this credibility issue – Robbie may be the one underling in the history of cinema you won't find yourself rooting for.

If *The Angels' Share* was a film which steadfastly resisted sentiment, that wouldn't matter much, but as its whimsical title hints, Loach is hoping to sprinkle some of the same Capra-esque fairy dust that made his 2000 film, *Looking for Eric*, such an unexpected joy. Paul Hareshaw's script cuts a lot of corners to deliver our hero from the depths of hopelessness to a happy ending. Kindly relations are on hand with luxurious rent-free accommodation, corruptible whisky connoisseurs turn up at just the opportune moment, and the police are all conveniently dumb.

Without the *Kenzie of a Hollywood* talent to smooth them over, however, these wiles in credibility remain irritatingly obvious. You don't expect acrobatics over ultra-red security beams in a Loach film, but some dosing of destiny in the robbery itself would have been both entertaining and logical. Instead, Loach has washed his social realist credibility down the gloopie and failed to compensate with charm, leaving only the sediment – petty crime,

grey dies and glibby counsel flats – like a nest of grime round the bathtub.

A bigger disappointment is the missed honour. As fans know, the director's best work is marked by those natural comic moments that arise from his improvisational methods – the football pitch scene in *Kenzie*, the bawling air banner in *Riff Raff*. Since the jokes seem stale, over-reliant on his fire and ink, and often at the expense of the same Scottish working classes they're supposed to be giving a voice to. All of which makes for a rather poor homage to the Whisky Galore! spirit of great nonsense. **Ellen E Jones**

ANTICIPATION. Whisky Galore! meets *Kenzie*. It should be a giggle.

4

ENJOYMENT. Mildly diverting, but undeniably disappointing.

2

IN RETROSPECT. The time is ripe for a great Ken Loach film. If only Ken Loach was up for making one.

2

The Fairy

Directed by **Dominique Abel**,
Fiona Gordon, Bruno Romy
 Starring **Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon,**
Bruno Romy
 Released **June 19**



Say what you will about the daffy Planophone comedies of Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon and Bruno Romy, you've got to credit them for putting their collective heart and soul into a cinematic project that is so unreservedly, wonderfully unfashionable. This follow-up to 2008's *sunlight* Romy sees the two cheerfully herding together the same cascade of mismatched influences – Jacques Tati and Buster Keaton via Georges Méliès, Jacques Demy, Mr Bean, Benji Hill and daytime, quasi-subversive children's television – to produce a not piecemeal romantic comedy that becomes more than a mere patch of earnest ransacking.

Abel plays Don, a woody night clerk for a hotel in Le Havre who receives a strange visit from an apparently insane drifter named Hana (Gordon) who introduces herself as a

fairy. After she saves his life, Don falls in love with Hana and she grants him three wishes. Following a wild night of skinny-dipping (and the actors' wry faience give extra credence to the term) and an eccentric romance consisting dance, she is thrown into an asylum before he can have his third and final wish granted.

The narrative is delightfully unhinged to the point that it perhaps has a few too many diversions and idiosyncrasies for its own good. The sight of Abel and Gordon knowing their elastic frames together in a variety of innovative poses is a joy; you only wish they were as inventive and flexible as storytellers. Their sense of romance is infectious, and a single set-up such as Hana using a mirror to reflect sunlight to catch Don's attention while he heads to his rooftop garden, is executed with admirable

defiant wit if it's the sole function of a comedy to make the audience chuckle, then you'd be inclined to chalk *The Fairy* up as something of a charming failure. **David Jenkins**

ANTICIPATION. More creative, conceptual clowning from Abel, Gordon and Romy **3**

ENJOYMENT. All over the place, but somehow it retains a sweet tonal cohesiveness. **3**

IN RETROSPECT. Never brilliant in any single aspect, but you'd happily join them for another madcap adventure **3**

Mitsuko Delivers

Directed by **Tōyo Ishii**
 Starring **Mitsuko Minashima, Aoi Nakamura,**
Ryo Ishibashi
 Released **4 May**



The main problem with *Mitsuko Delivers*, Tōyo Ishii's latest comedy-drama, cut from the same cloth as 2010's *Donato Donato*, is that the epochness headline is so thoroughly unlikable: lively pregnant and living alone in Tokyo, 34-year-old Mitsuko (Rina Nakajima) does her best to renege a struggling community, help a short-order cook in both business and romance, and, eventually find her place in the world. But she's boorish, bossy and immature.

From her misanthropic attempts at making friends with a new neighbour – by barging into her home and offering salty homemade pickles, of course – to being rebuffed by a pair of nervous romantic men, it's hard to feel any sympathy toward a character who is so punky and scornful most. Even though she means well, Mitsuko lacks the whimsical charm of, say, Audrey Tautou's *Amélie* (another single lady who dedicates herself to helping others), and it's no real surprise that she's alone, estranged from her lady's father and desecrating her dating parents, who think she lives in California.

Mitsuko does have a spiritual side – a

deep-felt belief that in times of stress, one should take a nap until the word "kawaii" goes away" and something better comes along. One such repose results in a taxi-ride across town, where, alone, penniless, she arrives at the sun-down treatment where she lived briefly in a chair.

It's here that we discover the source of her harsh nature – the no-nonsense landlady (Miyoko Inagawa), now infirm, who first taught Mitsuko the notion of living an shi or 'cool' life, which becomes a recurring theme within the film. Herein lies another problem: as is a Japanese aesthetic ideal of refinement, simplicity and spontaneity, something akin to 'chic' in English. To translate it as merely 'cool' (complete with quotation marks) feels forced and anything but shi, particularly when the performances are so exaggerated.

This feeling of being lost in translation continues with Ishii's approach to multilingualism. Having lived in the US, Mitsuko peppers her speech with English phrases – possibly to reflect her can-do attitude – and yet she crudely describes her former

boyfriend as "American. Or... African. I'm not sure but he was kinda big and really black."

This lack of subtlety pervades *Mitsuko Delivers*: Ishii dabbles in social commentary through fastbacks to a happier era and history-laden dialogue reminding us that, times are tough, "we're all struggling" and "more than ever, we need to help each other." There's also a prolonged final act that reaches new levels of shrill. *Tenore* brightens, the lady is on his way. Mitsuko's parents arrive and characters are reduced to yelling at one another. **Liz Haycraft**

ANTICIPATION. A female-led comedy from one of Japan's up-and-coming directors. **4**

ENJOYMENT. So long, so not "cool" **2**

IN RETROSPECT. Take a nap until something better comes along. **2**

Jeff, Who Lives at Home

Directed by Jay Duplass, Mark Duplass
Starring Jason Segel, Ed Helms,
Susan Sarandon
Released May 11



Set in the sleepy suburbs of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, *Jeff, Who Lives at Home* stars Jason Segel and Ed Helms as a pair of chafed-and-cheese brothers. Jeff (Segel) is a childlike stoner consumed by destiny as he's bound up with that of a local drug dealer named Kevin (Sean Ross). While Pat (Helms) is an aggressively insecure schmo who suspects his wife (Judy Greer) of cheating on him. Meanwhile, their estranged mother (Susan Sarandon) wrestles with the insistent affections of a secret admirer at her old office job. Across a long day, their paths all become intertwined.

The opening montage of old family photographs establishes a reflective tone which somehow survives the following sequence in which Jeff sits on the toilet, reliving his wood-aided interpretation of *11 Night*. Yasunaka's loopy lyrics, says, like a voice recorder. The film subsequently trends into curious territory,

somewhere between vague, deadpan mystery, shaggy-dog comedy and evasive family drama.

With little in the way of conventional plot, a strong cast does well with the minimalist material. Helms is outstanding as his shrewdness, while the budding Segel is appealingly sensitive. Sarandon shines in a restrained display of slow-burn emotion.

While the low-key, naturalistic hallmarks of the positive 'ramblercore' genre are firmly in place, the Duplass brothers also appear to have infused a range of other influences to segment the film's patchwork aura. In particular, from Paster's Carter's Way and the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (single like aspects as examples of unlikely American anti-heroes chasing the truth under the influence of mind-altering substances).

Looking largest of all is John Kennedy Toole's New Orleans-set novel, *A Confederacy*

of Duncans, with which the film shares a distinct sense of place, an inescapably sad tone and a childlike protagonist indulged by his mother.

As a film about brothers that's authored by brothers, *Jeff, Who Lives at Home* feels like a very personal work, though an occasional sense of imperturbability is finally offset by a charming, perhaps even sentimental, sincerity. **Ashley Clark**

ANTICIPATION. Gnar pressed the Duplasses have numerous chops. **3**

ENJOYMENT. Odd, sweet and longed, but little to get your teeth into. **3**

IN RETROSPECT. At best, it could secure a cult following. **3**

If I Were You

Directed by Joan Carr-Wiggan
Starring Madsa Gay Harden,
Leonard Wiggan, Joseph Kell
Released June 8



The principle of the 'cross-crow' interchange that powered Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* and Deasy's *The Victim* (Mason From The Train) also drives *If I Were You*, in which two desperate individuals, thrown together by chance, join in a pact that will change the course of both their lives. Only in Joan Carr-Wiggan's film, the individuals are two rather different women (with a man in between).

Level-headed, middle-aged businesswoman Madsa (Marta Gay Harden) has just discovered that her husband, Paul (Joseph Kell), is having an affair with young, vagabond would-be-actress Lucy (Leonard Wiggan). Without revealing that she is Paul's wife, Madsa intervenes in a melodramatic suicide attempt by Lucy, and the two women drunkenly agree to follow each other's instructions in sorting out their respective problems – an agreement that

leads Madsa to take the lead role in a stage production of *King Lear*, alongside Lucy's Paul.

As Madsa gradually morphs into a virtual adulteress (and actress) and Lucy discovers her own untapped centre of gravity, their personality swap is reflected in a broader interchange of genres. For while the film's opening scenes, rooted in coincidence, maintain solemnity and breezy direct, might suggest a contained comedy of errors, these farcical materials are soon being reimagined as tragedy.

And while Madsa may only be impersonating Lucy, she is also being confronted in her real life with the loss of love, the disappointment of aging and the inevitability of death. Even if the film delivers plenty of wit and one of those 'happy endings' that Lucy says she no longer, it takes us through a maze of different moods and motifs to arrive there.

Meanwhile, as Madsa flirts out *Lear*, she also resumes a theme more typically associated with cinematic male protagonists: the middle-life crisis. Played by Hayden with both rage and ruse, this woman on the verge of nervous breakdown effects a happy ending with a sustained sincerity, never surrendering her integrity to a cheap laugh. **Austin Bikel**

ANTICIPATION. Paces of satisfaction and an-...? No thanks. **2**

ENJOYMENT. Enough middle-aged tragedy to offset any browns. **3**

IN RETROSPECT. A smart feminist take on the mid-life crisis. **4**

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